

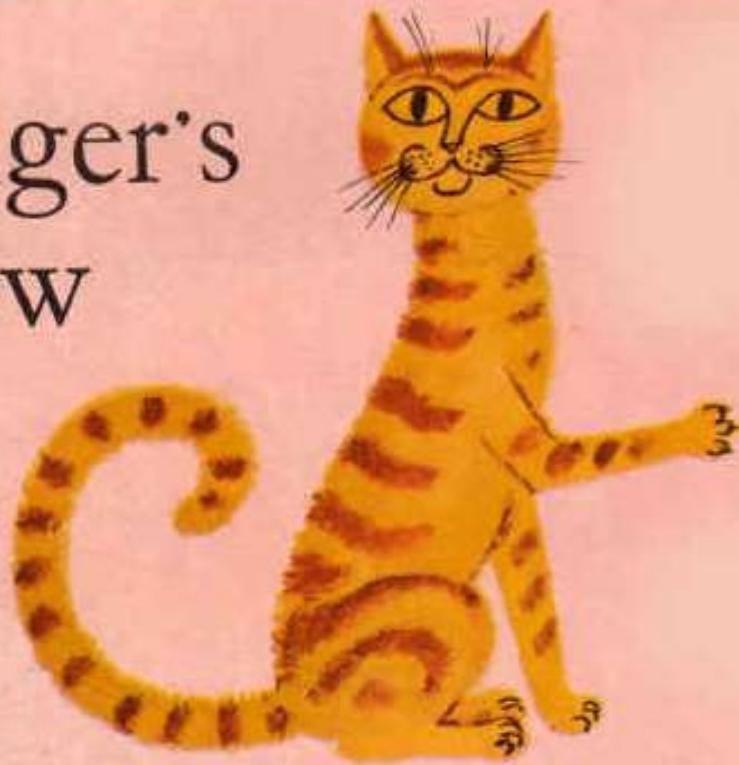
Eva Vassilevskaya

The Tiger's Nephew



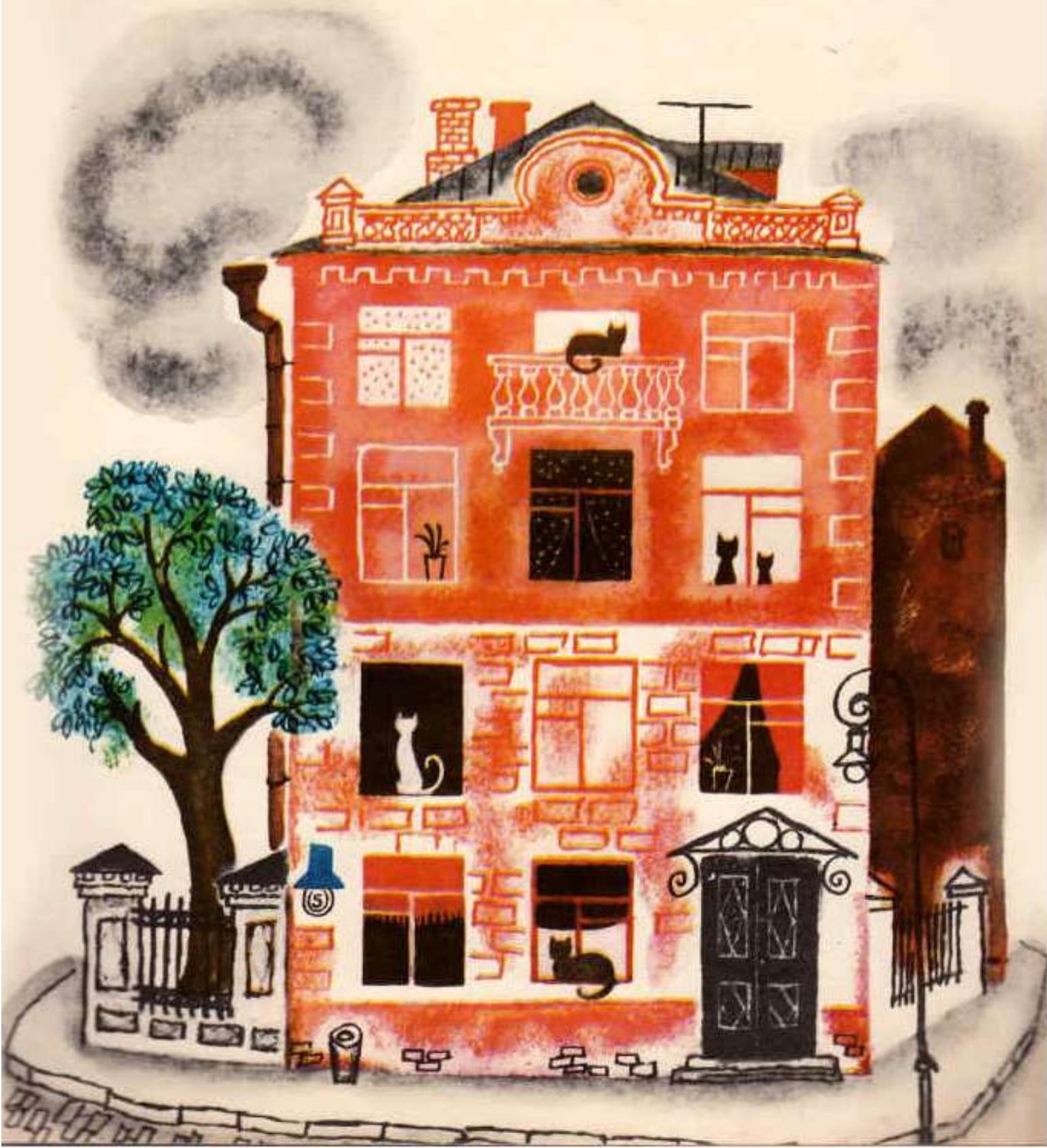


The Tiger's Nephew



Marmaduke, the striped ginger cat, once came across the picture of a tiger. "Would you believe it!" he exclaimed. "He looks just like me. His ears stand up – and so do mine. His whiskers stick out – just like mine. He has stripes – and so have I." Marmaduke gazed at the picture, turned it over several times, thought hard and made up his mind: "Well, I may not be his royal highness the tiger – but at least I am the tiger's nephew!"

From that time on he began to give himself airs and graces. The house where he lived was full of cats – but of the most ordinary kind. A grey tabby lived downstairs, a white one upstairs, a black cat and her black kitten above her and a ginger cat at the top of the house. None of them had orange stripes like Marmaduke – the tiger's nephew.



One evening when the cats were all gathered on the roof-top, they began to talk about the day's adventures, each with his own tale. The white cat started to tell of the lovely saucer of milk she had just drunk – but Marmaduke interrupted her. The ginger mouser was about to tell of his travels that day when Marmaduke cut him short. No one could get a word in edgeways. All the cats heard was: "My uncle's a tiger", "My uncle and I are tigers", "We drink nothing but cream", "We hunt nothing but wild game", "My uncle and I...". And so on....

Sooty, the little black kitten who lived upstairs with his mother, could not hold back his curiosity any longer, and asked Marmaduke shyly:

"What sort of tiger is your uncle?"

"Oh, the very biggest," answered Marmaduke proudly, "the grandest and cleverest of all wild beasts."

The little black kitten again plucked up courage and asked:

"Where does your uncle live? Do you think we could meet him?"



"Why not? You can, of course, but...." And here Marmaduke was not sure what to say.

The trouble was he did not know where the tiger did live; after all, he had only seen him in a picture.

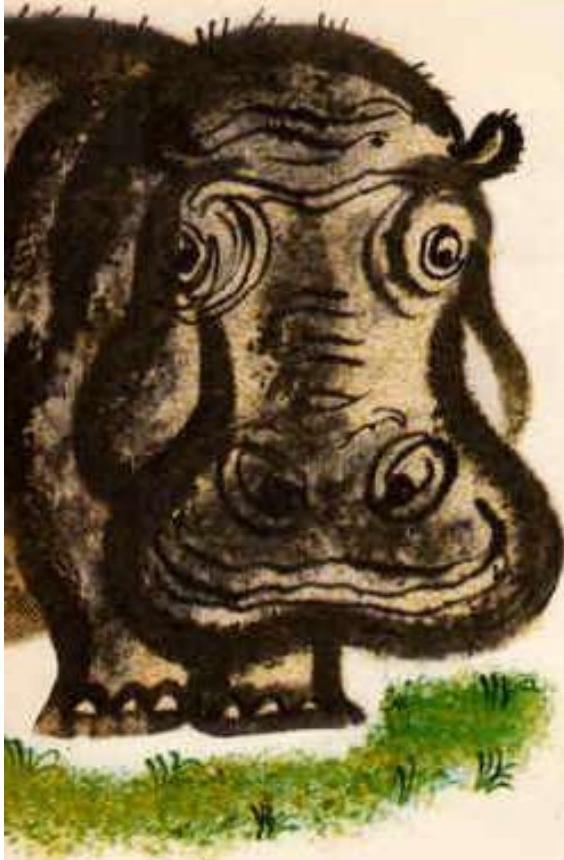
But Sooty's curiosity was not satisfied: "So, where exactly does your uncle live?"

If it had not been for the ginger mouser, Marmaduke would have been in a proper pickle. The ginger cat was a great prowler and knew every street and alley for miles around.

"I know!" he cried. "The tiger lives in the zoo. It has all sorts of wild beasts, big and small. Especially lots of sparrows. The zoo is my favourite hunting ground."

"Yes, that's right," said Marmaduke, "my uncle does live in the zoo. I was just about to tell you that but you all kept interrupting me."





"Let us all go to the zoo," suggested the ginger cat. "We shall see your uncle the tiger and I can hunt some sparrows."

So the next day, early in the morning, the cats set off. They scuttled over three roof-tops, crossed two backyards, squeezed through a hole in a fence and there they were inside the zoo.

"You go first," the ginger cat told Marmaduke. "Lead us to him. You know best what your uncle looks like."

"Of course," said Marmaduke. "He is the biggest, the handsomest and the cleverest of all beasts. After me!"

And off went the cats to find the tiger. The tiger's nephew took the

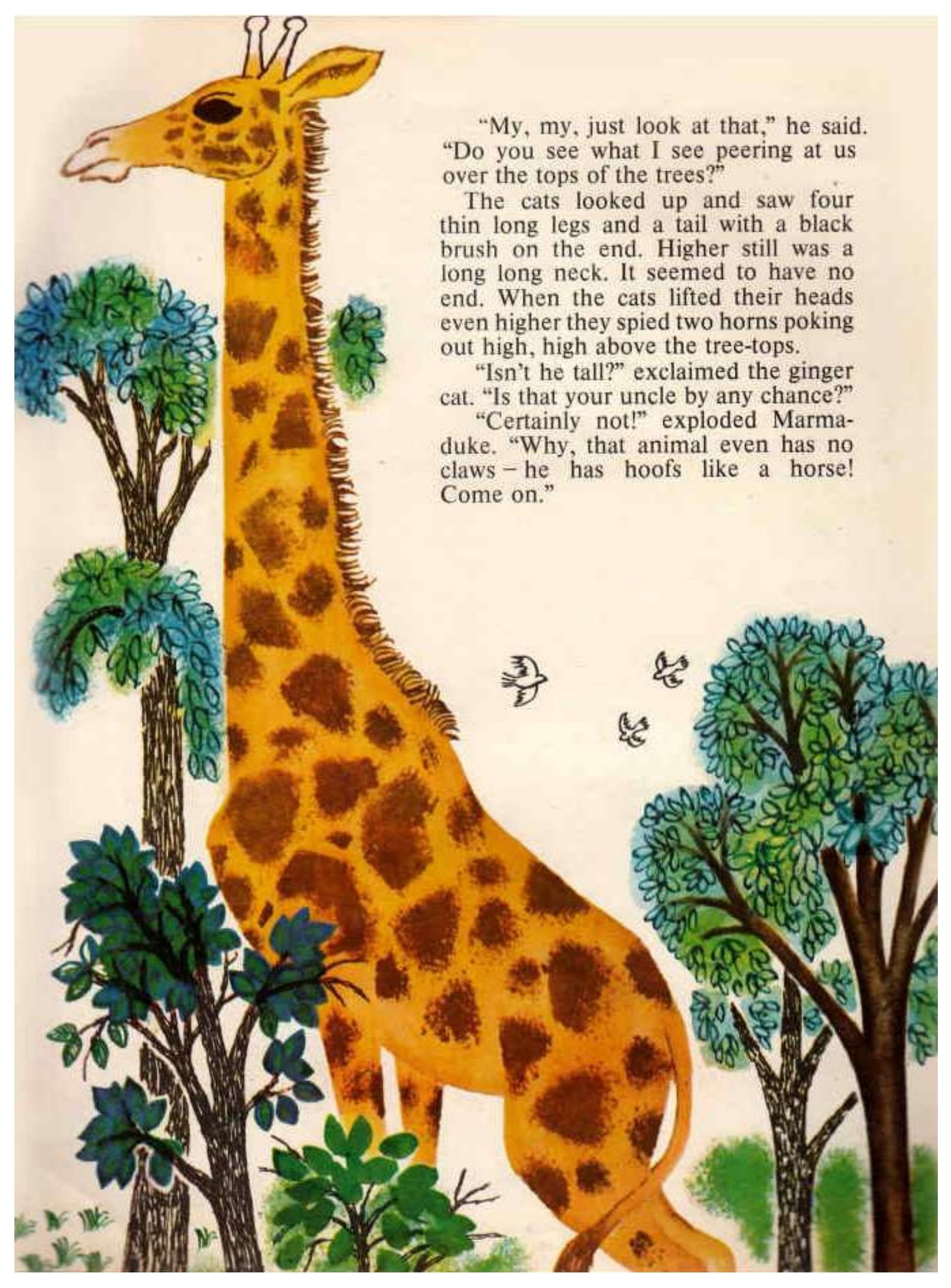
lead, followed by the black cat and her kitten; then came the grey tabby with the white cat behind. Bringing up the rear was the ginger cat stalking sparrows on the way.

"Stop, look at that!" the black kitten shouted all of a sudden. "Who is that climbing out of the water? Gosh, see how fat he is. His stomach nearly reaches to the ground! He must be your uncle, isn't he?"

"What, that fat frog?" said Marmaduke offended. "Come now, can't you see his skin is smooth, while we tigers are furry and striped. Come on."

On went the procession. Suddenly the ginger cat stopped in his tracks.



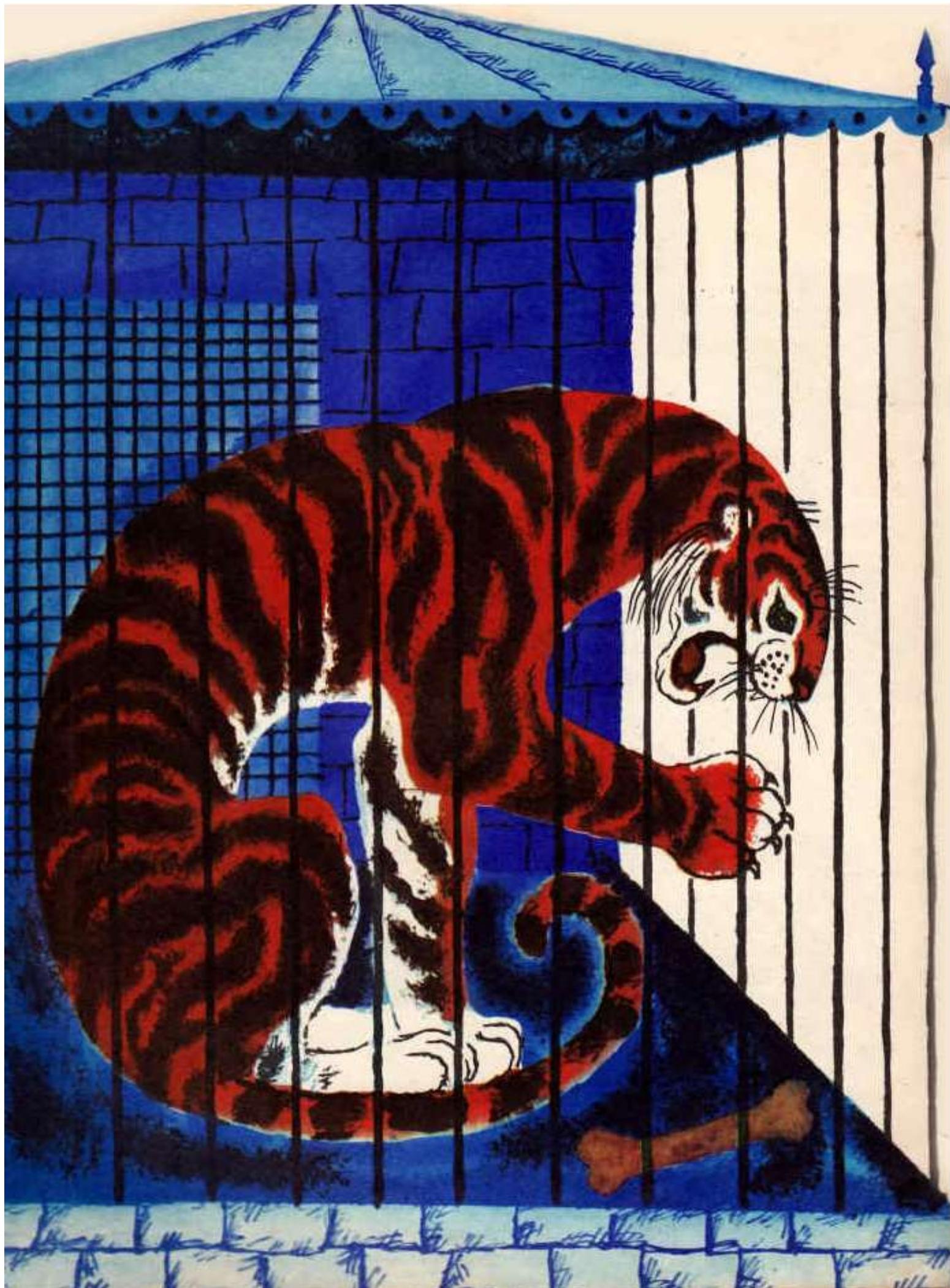


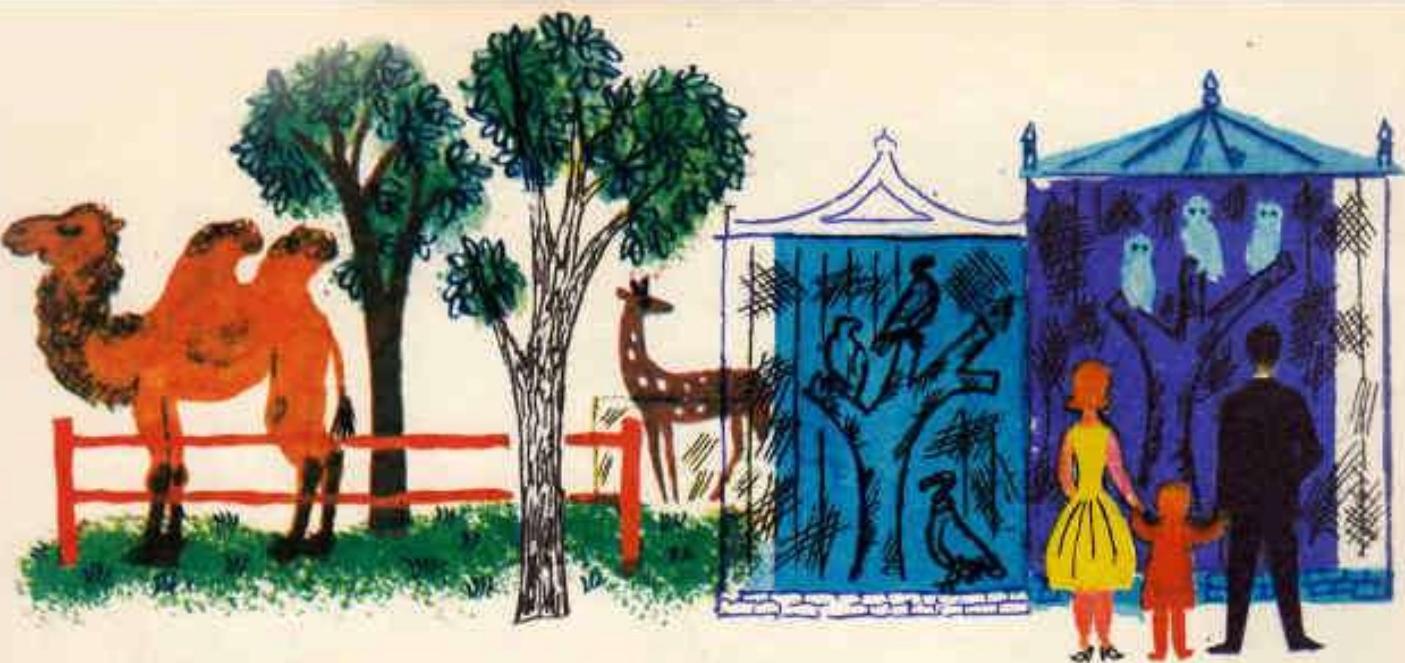
"My, my, just look at that," he said.
"Do you see what I see peering at us
over the tops of the trees?"

The cats looked up and saw four thin long legs and a tail with a black brush on the end. Higher still was a long long neck. It seemed to have no end. When the cats lifted their heads even higher they spied two horns poking out high, high above the tree-tops.

"Isn't he tall?" exclaimed the ginger cat. "Is that your uncle by any chance?"

"Certainly not!" exploded Marmaduke. "Why, that animal even has no claws - he has hoofs like a horse! Come on."





The cats continued their excursion, turning to the left and right until they came to a cage. And in it sat an animal. Its ears stood up, its whiskers stuck out, and it was striped from head to tail.

"There he is, my uncle the tiger!" shouted Marmaduke. "Now, you just sit here and wait. I'll go and say hello, talk for a bit and then, perhaps, I'll introduce you."

The cats all sat to the side waiting. Marmaduke walked boldly towards the cage. But the closer he came, the less sure he was: his uncle certainly seemed rather huge and frightening in real life. As Marmaduke came nearer his legs seemed to wobble under him as he noticed two big yellow eyes fixed on him.

"Hello, uncle tiger," Marmaduke stuttered. "I...." and his fear struck him dumb.

The tiger struck the floor with his mighty tail, opened his powerful jaws to reveal his terrible fangs and suddenly something rumbled like empty barrels trundling across a stone bridge, like heavens rolling in anger, like nothing on earth....

Up sprang the cats and ran for all they were worth. Off went the white, the tabby, the black and her kitten and the ginger. And in front of them all was the tiger's nephew running for dear life. Marmaduke was so scared he did not even hear the tiger's words. Actually, what he said to his nephew was "Grr-rr-rr-eetings!"





The Rabbit Who Loved To Count

Mother Rabbit had a whole burrow-ful of children. There was Jack Rabbit the Eldest, Peter the Next to Eldest, Fluffy Tail the Middle One, Bobtail the Next to Middle One, Baby Brown Ears, and, last of all, Little Willie.

Like all little rabbits they loved to hop, skip and jump, play hide-and-seek and they even fought now and again.

Only Little Willie did none of this. Instead, he counted. He would sit outside the front door—he was afraid of wandering farther away—and count.

A centipede came crawling by, hurrying home as fast as her tiny furry legs would carry her. Willie was pleased. Now he could count big numbers: "One leg, two legs, three legs...." Before he had time to say "four" the centipede had crawled away.

"Never mind," thought Willie, "she walks too quickly. I shall find something easier to count."

He stood on tiptoe and looked around. Not far off he spied a nestful of blue eggs in a hollow. The eggs lay on soft feathers, wisps of straw and grass.





Willie was pleased. "Now I can count something without them running away," he said happily.

He made himself comfortable in the hollow and began: "One little egg, two little eggs, three little eggs, four...." Just then he heard a whistling in the air and a lark came down onto the eggs. She covered them all up with her body.

"What are you doing?" she cried angrily at Willie. "What do you mean by looking at my eggs?"

Willie did not know what to say. He stuttered and stammered and tried to explain that he only wanted to count them.





But the mother lark shooed him off.

Poor Willie walked away hanging his head. There was nothing for him to count. All of a sudden he spotted some grains of corn lying on the ground. A whole pile of them. Probably they had fallen out of a sack.

He brightened up at once and began to count the grains quickly. He had got up to four when out of nowhere a flock of hungry sparrows appeared. They flapped, and chattered and pecked up the grains. In a flash all the corn was gone and the sparrows took off again.

Willie was so sad he began to cry as he made his way home. Once there he lay down on his bed in the corner of the burrow and sniffed himself to sleep.

Towards evening all the little rabbits hopped home: Jack Rabbit the Eldest, Peter the Next to Eldest, Fluffy Tail the Middle One, Bobtail the Next to Middle One and Baby Brown Ears. They had their supper and wanted to play more games. Willie just did not feel like playing, though they tugged at his ear, pulled his leg, tickled him.... All in vain, he just huffed and refused to play.

"Poor little dear, he is tired," said Mother Rabbit. She put her knitting to one side, took Willie on her knees and began to sing him a lullaby.

It was warm and cosy in his mother's arms and Willie's eyes began to close. From the doorway he could see a patch of dark blue sky with twinkling stars.

"Now, no one will stop me from counting", he thought. "I shall count every little star in the sky."

So he began: "One star, two stars, three stars, four...."

"Hush," said Mother Rabbit to her other children. "Sshhh, our youngest baby rabbit is asleep."





Drawings by David Kharlamov
Translated from the Russian by James Rutherford

**Э. Васильевская
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